



Klein Juggles People, Programs, Progress Reports

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MADISON – Some days, Duane Klein thinks his job is a lot like his hobby – juggling.

Unofficially, Klein is a self-taught juggler who's passed the skills on to his son. Officially, he is the agency liaison in the Bureau of Agrichemical Management, or BAM. It's the office within the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection that regulates pesticides, fertilizers, and animal feeds.

"I consider myself a bureau project manager," he says. "As larger projects come up, ones that involve many people or programs and a lot of time, like compiling our annual report, I coordinate them. I also look for efficiencies, how we can improve and streamline our processes and programs."

And that's where the juggling comes in.

The bureau issues thousands of licenses every year, along with conducting hundreds of inspections and collecting thousands of samples. Its programs are divided into investigation and compliance, water quality, and pesticide/feed/fertilizer sections. There are more than 40 employees, and about a third of them work out in the field.

On any given day, he might be working to organize and update the bureau's myriad forms, streamline the process for getting results from the DATCP laboratory, and track progress on a dozen sections of the annual report. He sets up spreadsheets with all the steps involved, including deadlines and who's responsible. He meets with individuals and groups within the bureau, the department, and other agencies – that's the liaison part of the job.

No flaming torches or wooden clubs, but it's juggling, no doubt about it. And it might seem a far cry from his original career plan.

"I grew up on a dairy farm in rural Sun Prairie. I got to talking to a food inspector there, and I was really interested in their jobs," he says. "So later, when I went to college (University of Wisconsin-Madison), I got an ag engineering degree with a specialty in food engineering. I was shooting for a job as a food inspector, but my first job at DATCP was not in the food division and I never got back to working with foods."

His first job out of college was as a "dairy field man" with the National Farmers Organization, helping farmers address their dairy equipment issues. But when he was hired at DATCP 24 years ago, it was as an agricultural engineer, designing systems to prevent animal waste runoff, before working with containment systems for bulk pesticides and fertilizers. He was involved in building the Agricultural Chemical Cleanup Program, and worked his way up to section chief for water quality. Then he was ready for a change from managing so many people, so when the agency liaison post opened three years ago, he applied.

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Duane Klein's hobby is a lot like his job some days.

"But I'm still managing people somehow," he says.

These days, a great deal of his time is spent on one huge project, dubbed "BAM-IT." That's short for Bureau of Agrichemical Management Information Technology. The bureau is evaluating all its processes, databases, and computer programs in an effort to streamline and make life easier for customers and employees alike.

"It involves every program – licensing, pesticide registration, certification exams for pesticide applicators, inspections, groundwater protection, complaint investigations – everything," he says. As he works with two business analysts, going through every process with a fine-toothed comb, other spin-off projects develop. The ultimate goal is to take all the information gathered about what the bureau does and how, and come up with one computer platform that will keep track of it all. It is part of a department-wide effort to do the same thing, become more efficient and provide better service to customers.

Klein explains that the vision is to allow licensees and other customers to create a log-in page, similar to Amazon.com or other websites where users set up accounts. When they log in, they could find out what licenses they needed, apply and pay for them online, see which of their employees were certified as pesticide applicators, if that was their business, look at inspection reports, and so on. With all the information in one searchable database, the bureau would be able to use the system to track trends. For example, if many people are having trouble complying with a particular provision of a rule, that might signal that something is wrong, and we could address it through better outreach instead of enforcement, Klein says.

"As an engineer, I think my mind works in a way that I can see what the steps are to complete a project, and how to organize it," he says. "But BAM-IT is so massive, and there's so much jargon and terminology I'm not familiar with. I'm still getting my mind wrapped around the size and complexity of it. We're trying to keep the customer in mind as we do this. We want to create efficiencies and automation to make it better for our customers."

The nature of Klein's job means that there is no typical day, no rhythm, no routine flow. "People come to me with a bunch of ideas, I write them down in a list, keep track and prioritize them, and try to get things done," he says. But that's good for someone who says he likes lots of different projects, and confesses to carrying his passion for efficiency so far as to map in his mind the most efficient route for his trips between meetings and offices in the building.

And it's good for someone who juggles for fun.

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